

# MORE ON PSYCHOTICS' SPEECH

by Abraham S. Luchins and Edith H. Luchins (1978)

## A Max Wertheimer Seminar Transcript by Abraham S. Luchins and Edith H. Luchins

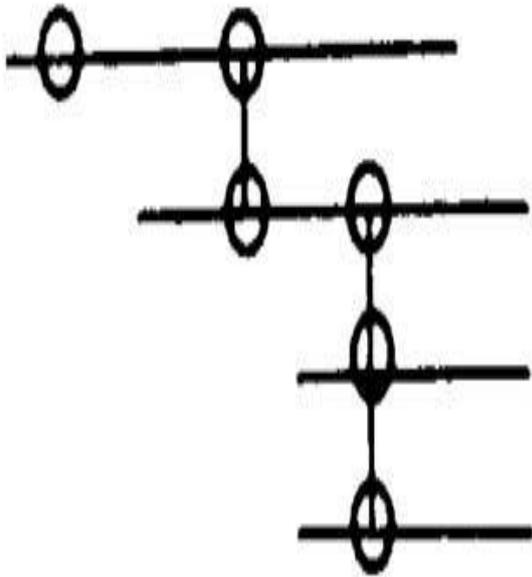
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ASL = Abraham S. LUCHINS ; the psychiatrist = [Erwin LEVY](#) ; the ideas discussed in this seminar were elaborated in more detail in Erwin LEVY's article about the schizophrenic thought disorder - for full text of this article click [here](#)

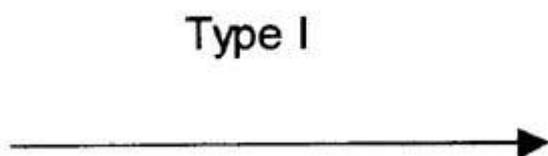
In the beginning of the session, the psychiatrist made some remarks about flight of ideas. Since it sounds like rhyming, some say that it must be due to sound associations; any association that comes up is expressed and the natural, normal association that should follow is not accepted. It is also said that it is due to arbitrary changes of attention, lack of attention, and of thinking. After a student commented, he said that these patients feel that they must talk to everybody; what is important is not the quality of their thinking but a tendency to communicate. WERTHEIMER remarked, You have nothing important to say but want to say lots of things; did you ever experience such a tendency? He suggested studying such cases. What is the effect of such speech on the situations in which it occurs? What is your feeling in them and what is your relation to them? After students' comments, WERTHEIMER remarked, What happens in flight of ideas is like when you wait for the husband of a woman who does not know what to do with you while you are waiting. She'll jump around in her conversation in order to make some contact with you.

The psychiatrist noted that there are situations in life when a sound person talks in rhymes and sings and it makes sense to the people who hear it, for example, when one is in love or has made a big success in business. WERTHEIMER remarked that sometimes when you find out that the person who is talking this way writes poetry, the whole situation changes. He then told of his friend who during political discussions with him in a coffeehouse would express his ideas in a poem. The psychiatrist went on to say that manic patients are like people who are in situations in which they say, Let's have a vacation, a festival (not all festivals are joyful). Everything becomes illuminated; everything that was so bad when the patient was depressed is now so rosy; the flight of ideas is an expression of the ease with which he now feels he may act and accomplish things. In response to a question he said, Schizophrenic speech has consistency, it has a definite quality; the whole quality is preserved and is even improved at times. But, in flight of ideas we have changes of the manifolds; it's like looking for flowers that have different colors. The visiting professor remarked that the schizophrenic speech fits PIAGET's concept of syncretism and the manic's speech fits the concept of juxtaposition; both are due to a breakdown in the barrier between self and the world, the patients regress to the egocentric level of mental development. Such patients are also animistic and have all the other signs of egocentricity of the child. A psychologist who had been doing research with GOLDSTEIN said that the speech and thought of the patients represent strong, primitive Gestalten. This was challenged by a student who said that GOLDSTEIN's work does not support Gestalt theory. The psychiatrist drew on the blackboard the following diagram:



Pointing to the diagram he said that a part-quality of different patterns is taken out. They are connected by certain parts of each situation which the patient uses to build the pattern of his idea. The patient has a different frame of mind; to understand him we need to get from our world to his and to understand the pattern of the flight of ideas. Someone said that this is similar to the piecemeal subtractive procedure used to make abstractions. Why does this procedure not lead to a flight of ideas? Someone said that the patient does not consistently use the same criterion. WERTHEIMER said that logical consistency sometimes produces nonsense; what is the difference between a logician's and a patient's nonsense? In response to a question, the psychiatrist said that the manic's speech and thought are more sensible than the schizophrenic's even though they seem to be opposites, structurally speaking. Someone commented that manic speech is a caricature of normal speech; discussions on a train or during dinner are sometimes like the manic's speech. WERTHEIMER remarked that in order to see the difference between speech in such situations and the manic's speech we must realize the entire situation. A visitor said that we will not realize it in situations where the structure of the flight of ideas is good and therefore we have to study it where it does not have good structure. The psychiatrist rejected someone's conjecture that a manic is a prisoner of the situation, that he reacts to every stimulus in it in contrast to the schizophrenic who is autistic; both are equally as much in the situation.

WERTHEIMER briefly commented that there are different kinds of trends in speech and thinking. There are two extreme types. Type I goes in one direction and has a clear structure; he drew:



Type II goes in all directions and does not have any good structure; he drew:

## Type II



In between these types is Type III in which there are variations of I and II; for example, a wandering away but a coming back. He drew:

## Type III



Such speech is like the response made by some people who when they are asked, Where is your left ear? put their right hand over their heads to reach their left ear. There are life situations where this must be done, where we have to talk indirectly. After a pause he added, Type II is OK in certain places but not in their offices, say the doctors. A student interjected that a doctor's office is not a cocktail party; it is a place where certain roles are played which require Type I speech and thinking. He went on to propose a survey of the life space of individuals in order to find out when and where they use Type I, Type II, and Type III speech and thinking and a survey of social situations in which people must use Type I, Type II, and Type III.

WERTHEIMER conjectured that the schizophrenic's speech is a subwhole in a greater whole but it is a subwhole that is relatively closed. How would you open it? Someone suggested the use of methods which WERTHEIMER had used in the discussions of criticism. WERTHEIMER asked, How would you do it in a concrete case? The mental hygienist proposed the use of ADLER's methods. When ASL asked why we cannot build a world into which the schizophrenic can step, she said that the patient has been in his world so long that he just cannot step out of it. Someone suggested that the new world could possess parts that overlap parts of the patient's world and gradually he would move out of his world. WERTHEIMER described GOLDSTEIN's method of setting up a world in which brain-damaged patients could be independent and productive.

ASL said that maybe people should learn to tolerate Type II kinds of thinking and speech; maybe the normal people have to change and not the patients. Thus abnormal behavior may be stimuli for constructive social change. WERTHEIMER remarked that people sometimes tolerate individuals who do not answer as expected and he gave this example. He once met an old professor and said to him, Good morning; the old man bowed, saying, 485 — good day and continued on his way. This led to some remarks about why certain eccentrics are tolerated but others are not. The mental hygienist said that some persons perform useful social functions; apart from their eccentricity they are socially valuable people. [Many positions requiring skill are held by patients in mental hospitals. See LUCHINS, 1959.]

WERTHEIMER quickly diagrammed the speech of the first case that had been presented and said that the purpose of such diagrams is to make objective descriptions possible; they lessen

subjectivity. Different possibilities give rise to different diagrams; we can study the diagrams and see what is what. Someone objected that the diagrams were subjective. A student pointed out that the diagrams illustrate the flow of the utterances, that there is nothing subjective about them. In fact, one criticism of the diagrams is that they deal only with the responses. The session ended with an argument over the value of the diagrams.